

Big question three:

Should advertisers have the freedom to say whatever they want?

Using industry and ASA information, students will have opportunities to:

- engage critically with a range of advertising
- discuss topical and controversial issues
- analyse ads to examine the impact on their audience
- explore and respond to ideas and beliefs other than their own
- speak and write to argue and persuade.

Students will explore:

- what is acceptable and unacceptable content in advertising
- the potential to mislead or cause harm and offence
- the shock tactics often used by some advertisers
- how to bring an idea / product to the market through advertising.

Teacher context

Advertising is part of our lives. It can inform us, amuse us or help guide our choices. It is found in various forms – a poster at a bus stop, an ad on the radio, an online display ad or a spread in a magazine. Given that advertising is all around us, it is perhaps no surprise that some advertisers will sometimes try to grab our attention by deliberately using shock tactics to startle us with graphic imagery or blunt slogans.

Shock tactics are often used by charities, governments and campaign groups to raise awareness of a cause or to raise funds. They have been used variously in the past to urge drivers to use their seatbelts, promote safe sex, raise awareness of racism and other injustices, or discourage smoking. They have also been used for commercial purposes by some very well-known brands such as Benetton, French Connection and Dolce & Gabbana. All types of shock advertising have led people to complain to the ASA.

The use of shock tactics raises an interesting question of how far it is justifiable to push the boundaries. Are our views different if the approach is used to advertise a “good cause” rather than for commercial gain? We can explore with students whether and how a diverse and democratic society should “manage” or “police” harm, offence and social responsibility in advertising.

Harm and offence rules (non-broadcast)

Harm and offence rules (broadcast)



Lesson one: What are the limits? 1 hour

Objectives

- To consider the divide between the acceptable and unacceptable in advertising.
- To explore advertising rules aimed at controlling the likelihood of causing harm and offence.

Activity one: Shock tactics – Valid or not?

Step one 5 mins Starter

Use the PowerPoint slide “What are the limits?” (*BQ3 / Resource 1*). The slide illustrates a complaint considered by the ASA and found to breach codes relating to harm and offence.



Show the slide with the image only. Let students consider the question:

- What is being advertised here?

Click to reveal **UlsterTrader.com** (which is a used car sales company).

Q / A

Raise the questions:

- Should advertisers be able to use whatever images they want?

- Should they be able to attach any image they want to any product or service?
- As long as it attracts attention, is it OK?
- Is this ad OK?

Step two 5 mins Debrief

The ASA said:

“This was a poster ad. 44 complainants challenged whether the poster was offensive, because it objectified women, degraded them and was sexist. Some complainants also considered that the poster implied that women, like cars, were commodities to be bought and sold.

We agreed with the complainants that the image of the woman's cleavage coupled with the strapline ‘Nice Headlamps. What do you look for in a car?’ was likely to be seen to objectify and degrade women by linking attributes of a woman, her cleavage, to attributes of a car, the headlamps, in a way that would be seen to imply a woman, like a car, was to be ‘selected’ for those attributes.

We concluded that the poster had caused serious offence to some readers and was likely to cause widespread offence.”

Do students agree with the ruling?

Step three 5 mins Link

Q / A

Where should the line be drawn?

If advertisers want to stand out from the crowd and attract our attention should they be able to push the boundaries by using shock tactics?

Do your views change according to who is using the approach? Consider commercial companies trying to sell goods or services and perhaps charities trying to promote a good cause.

Step four 25 mins

In this exercise, students will have the opportunity to consider some of the ethical issues raised by advertising, using ads that have been complained about to the ASA.

Using either the examples given on *BQ3 Resource sheet 2* or examples from the **Ad banks**, select a range of ads appropriate to your group. The ads provided are taken from a range of media – TV, press, poster campaigns – and are from both commercial and non-commercial organisations.

Tell students they are going to explore further some of the moral dilemmas raised by pushing the boundaries in ads. Is it sometimes justified to shock or offend to provoke discussion or gain attention?

Continued...

Big question three: Should advertisers have the freedom to say whatever they want?

Using the template on *BQ3 / Resource sheet 3*, copy enough sets of the materials to allow one ad per pair of students.

- In their pairs, students are asked to study their ad and record their responses to the questions on the inner boxes, then the outer boxes. Student 1 can complete the left of the sheet; Student 2 can complete the right side.
- Once they have completed this, they should then try to identify links between the inner and outer boxes, drawing lines between linked points. For example “I see a person with a fishing hook through their cheek.” “The ad wants me to relate smoking to being hooked or trapped.”
- When students are ready to move on, they swap their annotated ad with another pair. They review the new ad and the comments on the sheet they have just received, then add any additional points of their own.

- Pairs can continue to swap comments until they have seen either a selection or all of the ads chosen.

Step five 15 mins Debrief

Q / A

Who has ad A in front of them? Describe the content.

- Student 1 – Were there any links you could make between the content and the advertising rules?
- Student 2 – What were the links between your feelings and the intentions of the ad?
- Repeat to take comments on all of the ads used.
- Is there always a clear link between the ad content, the ad intention and possible offence?

Step six 5 mins Plenary

Q / A

- Are shock tactics an acceptable way of cutting through the amount of advertising around us and getting our attention?
- What are some of the dangers of using shock tactics? Would we become desensitised? Will ads have to become more extreme to gain our attention?
- Why would some organisations try to court this kind of publicity?
- Would complaints upheld by the ASA damage the organisation's reputation?

Lesson two: Developing an ad campaign 1 hour

Activity one: Developing an ad campaign

Objectives

- To apply knowledge and understanding to the process of developing an effective ad campaign.
- To research the aims and objectives of a leading national charity or topical social cause.
- To make judgements on appropriate content and the placement of ads.
- To develop a presentation pitch for their finished ad.

Step one Task outline

Tell students they have been asked to plan, develop and produce an ad for a leading national charity or social cause.

The ad may be for a magazine, newspaper, billboard, web page or for new media. Alternatively, they can produce a storyboard for a television ad.

They must think about the **purpose** of their ad, the **audience** for their ad, and the context in which it will be seen. They must also consider the **brand image** of the charity / cause they will be working for.

See *BQ3 Resource sheet 4* for a student guidance sheet.

Lesson one

Activity one: Shock tactics – Valid or not?

Teacher notes

NHS Stop smoking poster and TV campaign 2007



The ASA received 774 complaints about this anti-smoking TV and poster campaign. The Department of Health campaign was designed to encourage people to give up smoking in the run-up to the ban on smoking in public places. People thought the ad was distressing and offensive to adults and unsuitable to be seen by children. The ASA considered that the ads were suitable to be seen by adults, but agreed with complainants that they were not suitable for young children. The ASA therefore upheld the complaints about the ads appearing in untargeted media, such as a poster. It did not uphold the complaints about the TV ads and other targeted media, because the advertiser had taken steps to make sure the ad would not be seen by young children.

(N.B. The ruling for this ad is more than five years old and no longer appears on the ASA website.)

Barnardo's child poverty campaign 2003



The ASA upheld three complaints about this Barnardo's press advertisement which formed part of a national campaign.

The claim that "poverty ... is likely to lead him to a future of squalor" was challenged because it implied most babies born into poverty led a life of squalor.

The advertisers said the term "squalor" was used to describe the vast array of substandard housing many families living in poverty were forced to endure, which included homelessness, temporary accommodation and rough sleeping.

However, the ASA considered that the use of the term "squalor" implied filthiness, dirtiness and grimness, not just substandard accommodation. And that the image of a cockroach in a baby's mouth emphasised that interpretation and implied most children born into poverty would live in filth and dirt at some point in their lives. Therefore, the ASA concluded that the claim was misleading.

(N.B. The ruling for this ad is more than five years old and no longer appears on the ASA website.)

Paddy Power gambling poster campaign 2005



Seven complaints were made about this poster for a gambling company, which showed a pastiche of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper". The "Jesus" character was seated behind a stack of gambling chips and the "Apostles" seemed to be playing cards or roulette. The complainants objected that the poster was offensive.

The ASA considered that the representation of the Last Supper as a casino, with the familiar Christian imagery replaced with items used for gambling, could cause serious offence to people of a Christian faith, and banned the ad.

(N.B. The ruling for this ad is more than five years old and no longer appears on the ASA website.)

Lesson one

Activity one: Shock tactics – Valid or not?

Teacher notes *continued*

Belle D’Opium perfume TV ad, 2011



The ad featured a woman dancing, whilst pointing to her inner elbow and running her finger along the inside of her forearm. The voice-over stated “I am your addiction, I am Belle D’Opium. The new fragrance by Yves St Laurent.” Thirteen viewers complained the ad was irresponsible and offensive, because the woman’s actions simulated drug use.

The ASA agreed with viewers that the ad was socially irresponsible and unacceptable for broadcast, because the woman’s actions simulated drug use, and upheld the complaints.

Full discussion and ASA decision

Diabetes UK press and poster ad, 2009



The campaign attracted 16 complaints that it was distressing to children who had diabetes or knew their parents had the condition. They also found the ads’ appeal to fear and focus on the negative impact of diabetes offensive.

The ASA did not uphold the complaints because it considered that consumers were likely to infer that the ads were primarily targeted at people who might be at risk of developing illnesses or conditions because they had diabetes without knowing it, or at those who knew they had diabetes but were unaware of how serious the potential dangers could be.

Although there was an appeal to fear in people with diabetes who were unaware of the potential dangers of their condition or who led unhealthy lifestyles, and in people at risk of developing the condition, this was justified because it encouraged prudent behaviour: diagnosis and proper management of diabetes.

Full discussion and ASA decision

One of two press ads for Ryanair Ltd, 2012



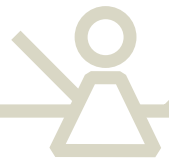
The ads attracted 17 complaints from the public that they were sexist and objectified women, particularly female cabin crew, and were offensive and unsuitable for display in a national newspaper. The ASA considered that most readers would interpret these images, in conjunction with the text “RED HOT FARES & CREW!!!” and the names of the women, as linking female cabin crew with sexually suggestive behaviour. It considered that the ads were likely to cause widespread offence, when displayed in a national newspaper, and therefore concluded that they breached the Code.

Full discussion and ASA decision

Lesson one

Activity one: Shock tactics – Valid or not?

Why might this ad break advertising rules?	What is the advertiser's purpose?
What can I see in this advert?	How does this make me feel?
Title	



Lesson two

Activity one: Developing an ad campaign

Objectives

- To apply knowledge and understanding to the process of developing an effective ad campaign.
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Step by step

1. Identify the charity or social cause you will be working for.
2. Research their aims, their branding and any existing campaigns.
3. Identify the **purpose** of your ad.
4. Identify the **audience** you will be targeting.
5. Decide which **form** your ad will take.
6. Choose the right media language so that it fits the aims and image of the charity and the intended audience.
7. Decide when and where you will want your ad to be seen.
8. What advertising guidelines will you have to consider and apply to your ad?
9. Prepare a presentation of your ad for the marketing team of your chosen cause.





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